Return to Use Initiative
2007 Demonstration Project

Eastland Woolen Mill:
Corinna, Maine

THE SITE: The 21-acre Eastland Woolen Mill site, located in Corinna, Penobscot County, Maine, was the location of the Eastland Woolen Mill, which operated as a textile mill beginning in 1909. Mill operations such as wool dyeing processes contaminated soils, ground water, and surface water and sediment associated with the East Branch of the Sebasticook River (EBSR). The site includes the former mill area where most of Eastland's plant operations took place, various Eastland properties throughout Corinna, downstream sections of the EBSR, and other areas where waste material was located. Beginning in 1998, U.S. EPA and the Maine Department of Environmental Protection undertook a comprehensive cleanup of the former mill area and other site-related properties. Cleanup activities included removing several underground storage tanks and addressing soil and sediment contamination and abandoned materials and wastes. In 2002, U.S. EPA selected a remedy to clean up ground water contaminated with chlorinated benzene compounds, and to return ground water to drinking water standards. Until those drinking water standards are met, the remedy imposes restrictions on the extraction and use of ground water within an area defined as the Institutional Control Zone (ICZ), which includes portions of the former mill area. The Town of Corinna is expected to develop an ordinance formalizing the ICZ and other mandated restrictions on ground water use. EPA completed the soil and sediment cleanup in 2003. The soil within the former mill area now meets residential cleanup standards. Construction of the site's ground water remedy was completed in 2006. The ground water cleanup activities continue on only a small portion of the former mill property.

THE OPPORTUNITY: After Eastland's operations ceased, the Town of Corinna experienced severe economic hardships and profound disruption to the community due to the loss of locally-based jobs, tax revenue, sewer fees, and even the cultural identity that the mill provided. As with many New England mill towns, the former mill complex physically dominated the downtown area. Leaving the site unusable following cleanup would have had devastating and permanent consequences for the Town's future. The Town recognized that the cleanup represented an opportunity to revitalize the downtown area if the cleanup could be aligned with their long-term vision for the downtown. They were determined not to lose this chance.

THE BARRIERS: To achieve this alignment, the Town had to prepare a revitalization plan that would meet the needs of the community and be compatible with the comprehensive site cleanup. In addition, it was recognized that if the Town's revitalization plans were to be realized, it would be necessary to satisfy potential investors, developers, and users that the property would

Barriers:
A small New England mill town with limited resources had a one-time opportunity to develop a reuse plan for its downtown area that could be integrated with the Superfund cleanup of a large mill complex that physically dominated that area. It was also essential that the stigma of past contamination be overcome in order to stimulate revitalization

Solution:
An EPA reuse planning grant enabled the community to develop their vision for a new downtown area. Close coordination among the various stakeholders through frequent meetings and informal exchanges, such as the reuse assessment process, resulted in making clean, usable space available to implement the Town's vision. Institutional controls, a Ready for Reuse Determination, and the delisting of the portions of the site where the cleanup is complete will clearly communicate site use restrictions and minimize perceived barriers to reuse

Before:
21-acre former industrial property that created an economically disadvantaged community

After:
The development of a residential and commercial enterprise zone with public green space, including a riverside walking trail, a senior housing project, and a general store and restaurant in a historic structure that was preserved as part of the cleanup all contribute to the march towards a revitalized community

be safe to use. EPA also had to communicate any post-cleanup use restrictions that would need to be met to ensure that safe use. The scale and complexity of this effort was daunting, especially to a town with a population of only 2200.

THE SOLUTION: In 2001, U.S. EPA's Superfund Redevelopment Initiative provided Corinna with a grant to develop a reuse plan for the site and surrounding area. Completed in 2002, this Reuse Plan for Corinna Village Center aims to revitalize the Town by bringing commercial enterprises back into the downtown area along with residential and recreational activities. Importantly, the community established a stakeholder committee that met regularly to help guide the reuse planning process and to oversee the integration of the revitalization and cleanup activities. The community at large also took an extremely active interest in this process. U.S. EPA made it a priority to work with the Town of Corinna, the Maine Department of Environmental Protection, Maine Department of Transportation, and several other state agencies and stakeholder groups to implement cleanup activities in a manner that fit the future vision for the community while achieving the objectives of the cleanup. This involved coordinating numerous informational meetings involving the Town. To further ensure that the cleanup and reuse were being properly aligned, U.S. EPA issued a Reuse Assessment for the site in September 2003. The Reuse Assessment summarized EPA's understanding of the current and potential future uses of the site, and identified potential reuse related barriers, issues, and data gaps needing resolution. The Reuse Assessment also provided useful information to developers and other interested parties about the cleanup status of the various site parcels.

Notably, in 2004, the site was selected by the Associated General Contractors of America to receive its prestigious national Build America Award for innovative achievements in site remediation and restoration. In the near future, U.S. EPA plans to issue a Ready for Reuse (RfR) Determination and remove from Superfund designation those portions of the site where the cleanup activities are complete (a so-called "partial delisting"). The RfR Determination will identify those portions of the site that EPA has determined are ready for specified uses and clarify any cleanup-related restrictions that might exist. The RfR Determination and partial delisting will provide additional assurances that the site is ready for reuse and thereby help facilitate redevelopment.

THE SITE NOW: Most of the cleanup has been completed and significant progress has already been made to achieve the community's reuse vision. Construction of a senior housing facility on the back portion of the site was completed in 2005. A historic structure that was relocated as part of the site cleanup now serves as a restaurant and general store. Over 80% of the area that was formerly contaminated or impacted by the cleanup action is now available for use. Corinna residents can now be proud of their outstanding efforts to rejuvenate the downtown area. The complete transformation of the downtown – including the realignment of the highway and river, development of recreational trails (walking and snowmobile), and the resurgence of economic activity with the senior housing project, general store, and restaurant – did not seem possible as little as 10 years ago after the mill locked its doors and walked away from the community. The site is a testament to the success that can be achieved through an EPA, State, Local Government, and community partnership, and the critical role that reuse planning and planning grants can have on the revitalization of a community. The institutional controls should have minimal impact on the productive reuse of the site. The controls will prevent the installation of water supply wells or the installation of septic systems. There is a public water line and sewer line accessible to the properties available for reuse. In addition, soil excavated from the former cleanup areas is required to remain within a designated reuse zone. The soil can be used for grading or any other purpose as long as it remains on site. Although the soils meet residential use standards, this requirement was established to prevent transferring any lingering stigma to off-site locations that might otherwise receive this fill.

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